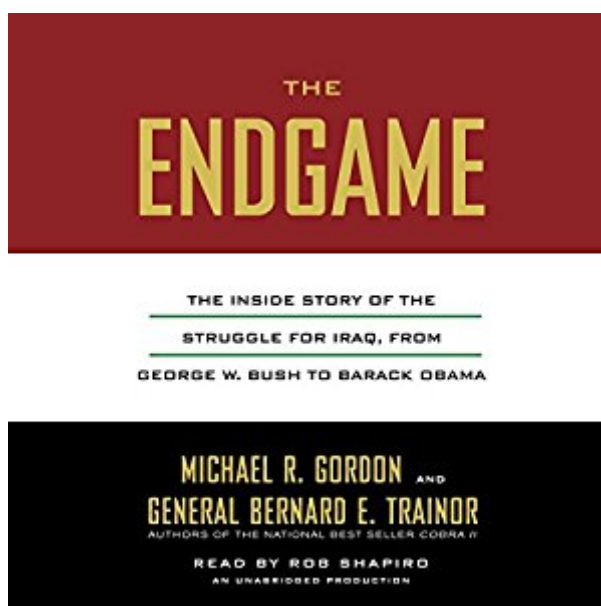


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The Endgame: The Inside Story Of The Struggle For Iraq, From George W. Bush To Barack Obama



Synopsis

Eagerly anticipated in the wake of their national best seller *Cobra II* ("The superb, must-read military history of the invasion of Iraq" - Thomas L. Friedman), *The Endgame* is Michael R. Gordon and General Bernard E. Trainor's most ambitious and news-breaking book to date. A peerless work of investigative journalism and historical recreation ranging from 2003 to 2012, it gives us the first comprehensive, inside account of arguably the most widely reported yet least understood war in American history - from the occupation of Iraq to the withdrawal of American troops. Prodigious research, *The Endgame* is not only based on an abundance of highly classified, still-secret government documents but is also brilliantly informed by access to key figures in the White House, the military, the State and Defense departments, and the intelligence community. Most strikingly, it is also informed by extensive interviews with both Sunni and Shiite leaders, key Kurdish politicians, tribal sheikhs, former insurgents, Sadrists, and senior Iraqi military officers, whose insights about critical turning points and previously unknown decisions made during the war have heretofore been conspicuously missing from the media's coverage of it. *The Endgame* is riveting as a blow-by-blow chronicle of the fighting. It is also relentlessly revealing, as it deftly pieces together the puzzle of the prosecution of American, Iraqi, and Iranian objectives, and the diplomatic intrigue and political struggle within Iraq since the American invasion.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

General Trainor and Mr Gordon form a rather successful team of military history writers. For those of the readers who are not acquainted with its previous work, this is their third title, the other two being

"The Generals'war" about "Desert Storm" (aka "Saddam Hussein against the world") and "Cobra II" which covers the 2003 Irak War. In every case, they offer a documented, critical and thoroughly entertaining view of each of the military operations portrayed. Despite the current literary trend of writing "trilogies", it seems it was not the intention of the authors of acting in such a way, however the end result is just a magisterial trilogy which covers the years 1990 to 2012 in this troubled spot of the world. This installment keeps the superb level attained in the other books, despite the fact of dealing with a longer span of time and a far more complex situation than any of the other titles did. In order to give an overview of Irak between 2003-2012, the writers have resorted to build the book with a lineal but straightforward structure, with three periods: 2003-2006, 2006-2008 and 2008-2012. The narrative flows seamlessly, making difficult to put down the book, and as usual they weave vignettes within a larger frame of things, and putting the myriad of characters into its context. Being a military history buff, in my humble opinion, Trainor and Gordon's efforts belong to the best american tradition, and as such comparable to the best of the "Green books" series, making a stark contrast to the botched continuation of the official US Army history of the operation. If "Generals' War" can easily compare to "Certain Victory", with both titles complementing each other, "Cobra II" is head over shoulders respect "On Point", whereas its continuation -covering just 2003-2006-and titled (not surprisingly) "On point II" is just a waste of money and a complete disappointment, a symbol of Mr Rumsfeld regrettable tenure as Secretary of Defense: it lacks originality, structure and is conspicuously absent of any critical intention. Qualities which "The Endgame" has in abundance.

My personal recollection of post-invasion Iraq consisted of an impressionistic patchwork of news reports on bombings, IED and suicide attacks, political debates, and opinion pieces. I didn't feel that I had a very coherent understanding of how we really got from point A to B in Iraq. I think most military history enthusiasts understand that there is some period of time required for the dust to sufficiently settle from historic events to allow the conscientious historian to assemble the facts (and opinions) behind something as chaotic as war and present a more pragmatic version of events. This book provided exactly what I look for in a historical record, with an incredible amount of behind-the-scenes information from interviews of the key players and declassified (and classified?) documentation, enabling me to form that coherent vision. I noticed some reviews criticize the book because they disagree with the authors' opinions expressed throughout the book. Personally, I don't care if the authors express their opinion as it is done here, in a non-heavy handed way and without disrupting the narrative. The key to this book is that the reporting of the history gives you sufficient, factual information to enable the reader to feel confident in forming his own opinion of events and

actions, and contrast it to the authors. If you can't accept a book where the author's opinion differs from your own, just go to a book store and read the Epilogue which summarizes the authors' thoughts on the management of post-invasion Iraq and you might save a few bucks.

“Do not try to do too much with your own hands. Better the Arabs do it tolerably than that you do it perfectly. It is their war, and you are to help them, not win it for them.”
--T.E. Lawrence

Notwithstanding, *The End Game* starts from the beginning. The early stuff has been covered elsewhere before, but is appreciated nonetheless. In particular, *The End Game* is focused on the colonels and generals, rather than, as most of the books on the subject I’ve read, the highest military brass and civilian leadership. We get the disaster of Bremer (he basically scuttled the entire Iraqi infrastructure, but never seriously invested in replacing it). In fact, the entire early war effort is a tragedy of errors. Casey was another disaster. He completely focused on a drawdown, when more and more evidence was pointing to its futility and the potential of counterinsurgency (a counterinsurgency strategy (under the guise of an “ink blot” strategy) was put forward as many as 16 months before the surge). Gordon and Trainor make a convincing case that our strategy was a failure even before Samarra blew the powder keg. We faced two serious problems. Sunni insurgent attacks led to Shiite Iraqis terrorizing Sunni Iraqis, often using the arm of the state. That opened the door for Al Qaeda to wage war directly against the Americans in Iraq. It’s always been fascinating to see the slow progress from virtually full support for a drawdown to the conclusion that the full surge, not simply a small increase. Petraeus had been pushing counterinsurgency, but it was viewed with great skepticism by his superiors. President Bush may have boldly accepted a large surge, but it was the generals on the ground who set the strategy for how the additional battalions would be used. The Sunni Awakening was one of the great surprises of the Iraq War. For all the arguments for the Surge, the effect of the Surge on the Awakening was not fully appreciated. The Awakening may have preceded the Surge, but the counterinsurgency tactics of the Surge took the Awakening out of Anbar. The Awakening started as “a bottom-up phenomenon driven by local Iraqis and the American units they encountered in the field. It was not something the generals . . . had organized from on high.” But recognized and appreciated, they were complementary and fed off each other. Sadly, this isn’t a story with a happy ending. We see the political tail wagging the policy dog in an administration dominated by former Senators. Both militaries wanted a continued US military presence, but the politics for the politicians were much trickier on both sides. It was a fundamental error by both the Bush and Obama administrations to

allow the Office of the Vice President greater influence than the State Department. The Office of the VP can never bring the kind of resources and infrastructure to bear that the State Department can. Despite the success of the surge, feckless decision making is leaving us back where we started before the surge. But then, I question whether, whatever the military success of the surge, we ever did the other things necessary to win. This review is of the Kindle edition. Just over 20% of the Kindle edition is devoted to reference material, etc., including acknowledgments, notes (hyperlinked both ways, and taking up 12% of the Kindle edition itself), index (hyperlinked), short bios of the authors, illustrations, maps and charts, and an also by.

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